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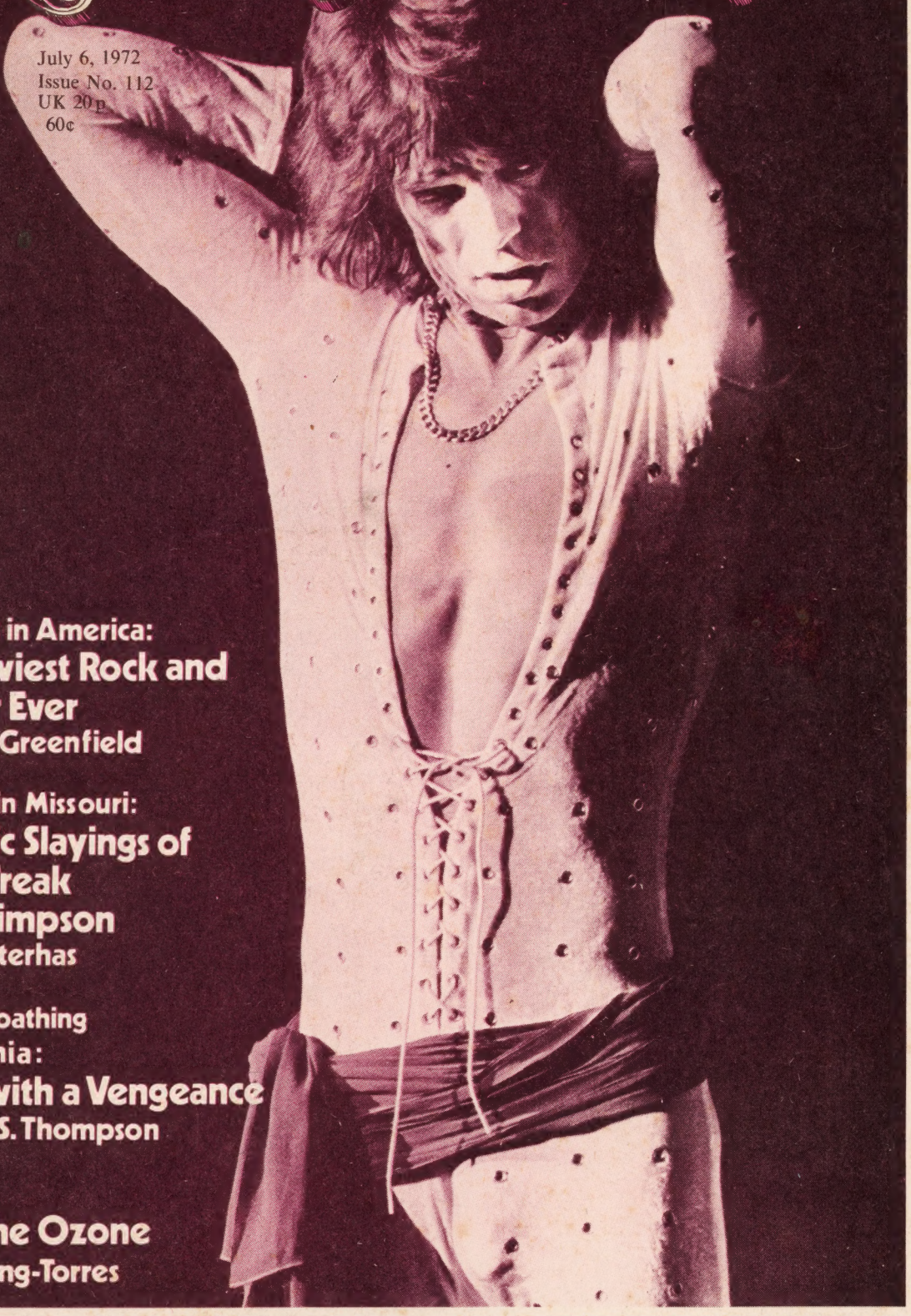

The Stones in America:
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Fear and Loathing in California:

Traditional Politics with a Vengeance

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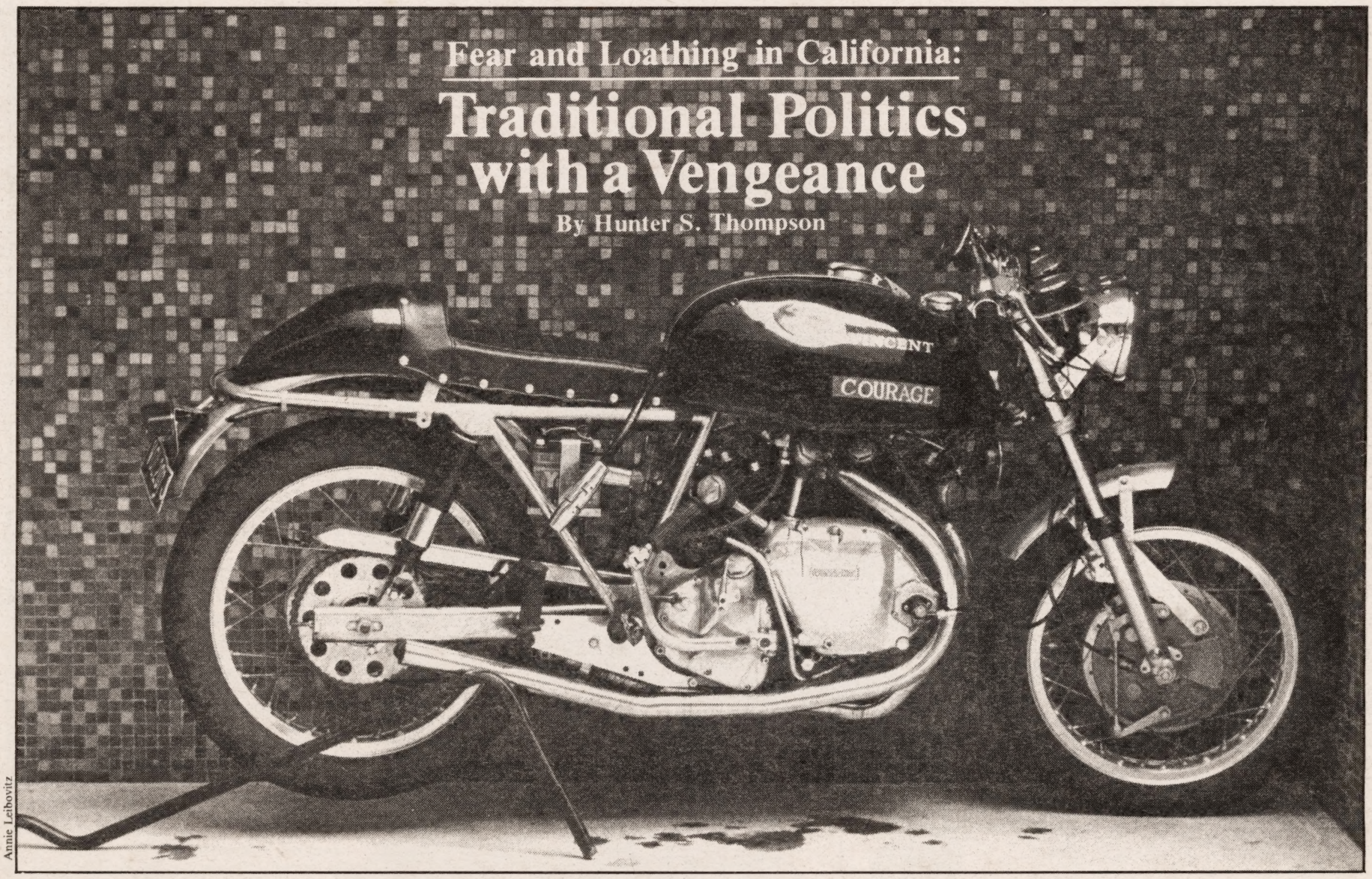

Annie Leibovitz

"In my own country I am in a far-off land.
I am strong but have no force or power
I win all yet remain a loser
At break of day I say goodnight
When I lie down I have a great fear of falling."

—Francois Villon

There is probably some long-standing "rule" among writers, journalists and other word-mongers that says: "When you start stealing from your own work you're in bad trouble." And it may be true.

I am growing extremely weary of writing constantly about politics. My brain has become a steam-vat; my body is turning to wax and bad flab; impotence looms; my fingernails are growing at a fantastic rate of speed—they are turning into claws; my standard-size clippers will no longer cut the growth, so now I carry a set of huge toe-nail clippers and sneak off every night around dusk, regardless of where I am — in any city, hamlet or plastic hotel room along the campaign trail—to chop another quarter of an inch or so off of all ten fingers.

People are beginning to notice, I think, but fuck them. I am beginning to notice some of *their* problems, too. Drug dependence is out in the open, now: some people are getting heavy into downers—Reds, Qualudes, Tuinols—and others are gobbling speed, booze, Maalox and other strange medications with fearsome regularity. The 1972 presidential campaign is beginning to feel more and more like the second day of a Hell's Angels Labor Day picnic.

And we are only halfway home: Five more months . . . the moment I finish this goddam thing I have to rush up to New York for the June 20th primary, then back to Washington to get everything packed for the move to Colorado . . . and after that to Miami for the Democratic Convention, which is shaping up very fast these days as one of the most brutal and degrading animal acts of our time.

After Miami the calendar shows a bit of a rest on the political front—but not for me: I have to go back out to California and ride that goddamn fiendish Vincent Black Shadow again, for the road tests. The original plan was to deal with the beast in my off-hours during the California primary coverage, but serious problems developed.

Ten days before the election—with McGovern apparently so far ahead that most of the press people were looking for ways to *avoid* covering the final week—I drove out to Ventura, a satellite town just north of L.A. in the San Fernando Valley, to pick up the bugger and use it to cover the rest of the primary. Greg Jackson, an ABC newscaster who used to race motorcycles, went along with me. We were both curious about this machine. Chris Bunche, editor of Choppers magazine, said it was so fast and terrible that it made the extremely fast Honda 750 seem like a harmless toy.

This proved to be absolutely true. I rode a factory-demo Honda for a while, just to get the feel of being back on a serious road-runner again . . . and it seemed just fine: very quick, very powerful, very easy in the hands, one-touch electric starter. A very civilized machine, in all, and I might even be tempted to buy one if I didn't have the same gut distaste for Hondas that the American Honda management has for ROLLING STONE. They don't like the image. "You meet the nicest people on a Honda," they say — but according to a letter from American Honda to the ROLLING STONE ad manager, none of these *nicest people* have much stomach for a magazine like this one.

Which is probably just as well; because if you're a safe, happy, *nice,* young Republican you probably don't want to read about things like dope, rock music and politics anyway. You want to stick with Time, and for weekend recreation do a bit of the laid-back street-cruising on your big fast Honda 750 . . . maybe burn a Sportster or a Triumph here & there, just for the *fun* of it: But nothing serious, because when you start that kind of thing you don't meet many *nice people.*

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Jesus! Another tangent, and right up front, this time—the whole *lead,* in fact, completely fucked.

What can I say? Last week I blew the whole thing. Total failure. Missed the deadline, no article, no wisdom, no excuse . . . Except one: Yes, I was savagely and expertly duped by one of the oldest con trips in politics.

By Frank Mankiewicz, of all people. That scurvy, rumpled, treacherous little bastard . . . If I were running for president I would hire Mankiewicz to run my campaign, but as a journalist I wouldn't shed a tear if I picked up tomorrow's paper and saw where nine thugs had caught poor Frank in an alley near the Capitol and cut off both of his Big Toes, making it permanently impossible for him to keep his balance for more than five or six feet in any direction.

The image is horrible: Mankiewicz gets a phone call from Houston, saying the Texas delegation is on the verge of selling out to a Humphrey-Wallace coalition . . . he slams down the phone and lunges out of his cubicle in "McGovern for President" headquarters, bouncing off the door-jamb and then grabbing the Coke machine in order to stay upright—then lunging again into Rick Stearns' office to demand a detailed breakdown on the sex lives and bad debts of every member of the Texas delegation . . . then trying to catch his breath, gasping for air from the terrible exertion, and finally lunging back down the hall to his own cubicle.

It is very hard to walk straight with the Big Toes gone; the effect is sort of like taking the keel off a sailboat—it becomes impossibly top-heavy, wallowing crazily in the swells, not even the sea-anchor will hold it upright . . . and the only way a man can walk straight with no Big Toes is to use a very complex tripod mechanism, five or six retractable aluminum rods strapped to each arm, moving around like a spider instead of a person.

Ah . . . this seems to be getting heavy. Very harsh and demented language. I have tried to suppress these feelings for more than a week, but every time I sit down at a typewriter they foam to the surface. So it is probably better—if for no other reason than to get past this ugly hang-up and into the rest of the article—to just blow it all out and take the weight off my spleen, as it were, with a brief explanation.

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Morning again in downtown Los Angeles; dawn comes up on this city like a shitmist. Will it burn off before noon? Will the sun eventually poke through? That is the question they'll be asking each other down there on the Pool Terrace below my window a few hours from now. I'm into my 18th day as a resident of the Wilshire Hyatt House Hotel, and I am getting to know the dreary routine of this place pretty well.

Outside of that pigsty in Milwaukee, this may be the worst hotel in America. The Sheraton-Schroeder remains in a class of its own: Passive incompetence is one thing, but aggressive nazi hostility on the corporate level is something else again. The only thing these two hotels have in common is that the Sheraton (ITT) chain got rid of them: The Schroeder was sold to a local business magnate, and this grim hulk ended up as a part of the Hyatt House chain.

As far as I know there was no pool in the Schroeder. Maybe a big grease pit or a scum vat of some kind on the roof, but I never saw a pool. There were rumors of a military-style S&M gallery in the basement, with maybe an icewater plunge for the survivors, but I never saw that one either. There was no way to deal with management personnel in the Schroeder unless your breath smelled heavily of Sauerbraten . . . and in fact one of the happiest things about my life, these days, is that my memories of life in the Sheraton-Schroeder are becoming mercifully dim. The only open sore that remains from that relationship is the trouble I'm still having with the IBM typewriter-rental service in Milwaukee — with regard to the $600 Selectric Typewriter I left behind the desk when I checked out. It was gone when the IBM man came around to pick it up the next morning, and now they want me to pay for it.

Right. Another contribution to the Thousand Year Reich: "We will march on a road of bones. . . ." Tom Paxton wrote a song about it. And now I get these harsh letters from Milwaukee: "Herr Docktor Thompson — Der Typewriting machine you rented hass disappeared! And you vill of course pay!"

No. Never in hell. Because I have a receipt for that typewriter.

But first things first. We were talking about motorcycles; Jackson and I were out there in Ventura fucking around with a 750 Honda and an experimental prototype of the new Vincent—a 1000-cc brute that proved out to be so awesomely fast that I didn't even have time to get scared of it before I found myself coming up on a highway stoplight at 90 miles an hour and then skidding halfway through the intersection with both wheel-brakes locked.

A genuinely hellish bike. Second gear peaks around 65—cruising speed on the freeways—and Third winds out somewhere between 95 and 100. I never got to Fourth, which takes you up to 120 or so—and after that you shift into Fifth.

Top speed is 140, more or less, depending on how the thing is tuned—but there is nowhere in Los Angeles County to run a bike like that. I managed to get it back from Ventura to McGovern's downtown headquarters hotel, staying mainly in second gear, but the vibration almost fused my wrist bones and boiling oil from the breather pipes turned my right foot completely black. Later, when I tried to start it up for another test-run, the backlash from the kick-starter almost broke my leg. For two days afterward I limped around with a golfball-size blood-bruise in my right arch.

Later in the week I tried the bastard again, but it stalled on a ramp leading up to the Hollywood Freeway and I al-

most broke my hand when I exploded in a stupid, screaming rage and punched the gas tank. After that, I locked it up and left it in the hotel parking lot—where it sat for many days with a McGOVERN FOR PRESIDENT tag on the handlebars.

George never mentioned it, and when I suggested to Gary Hart that the Senator might like to take the machine out for a quick test-ride and some photos for the national press, I got almost exactly the same reaction that Mankiewicz laid on me in Florida when I suggested that McGovern could pick up a million or so votes by inviting the wire-service photographers to come out and snap him lounging around on the beach with a can of beer in his hand and wearing my Grateful Dead T-shirt.

Looking back on it, I think that was the moment when my relationship with Mankiewicz turned sour. Twenty-four hours earlier I had showed up at his house in Washington with what John Prine calls "an illegal smile" on my face —and the morning after that visit he found himself sitting next to me on the plane to Florida and listening to some lunatic spiel about how his man should commit political suicide by irreparably identifying himself as the candidate of the Beachbums, Weirdos and Boozers.

The Samoan Tragedy

The Villion quote was lifted from a book I wrote a few years ago on outlaw motorcycle gangs, and at the time it seemed like a very apt little stroke — reaching back into time and French poetry for a reminder that a sense of doomed alienation on your own turf is nothing new.

But why use the same quote to lead off another one of these rambling screeds on American politics in 1972? On the California Democratic primary? The McGovern campaign?

There has to be a reason. And there is, in fact — but I doubt if I'm up to explaining it right now. All I can say for sure is that I walked into the room and stared at the typewriter for a long time . . . knowing I'd just spent 17 days and $2000 in California, lashing together this 33-pound satchel of notes, tapes, clippings, propaganda, etc. . . . and also knowing that somewhere in one of these goddamn drawers is a valid contract that says I have to write a long article, immediately, about whatever happened out there.

How long, O Lord, how long? Where will it end?

All I ever wanted out of this grueling campaign was enough money to get out of the country and live for a year or two in peaceful squalor in a house with a big screen porch looking down on an empty white beach, with a good rich coral reef a few hundred yards out in the surf and *no neighbors.*

Some book reviewer whose name I forgot recently called me a "vicious misanthrope" . . . or maybe it was a "cynical misanthrope" . . . but either way, he (or she) was right; and what got me this way was *politics.* Everything that is wrongheaded, cynical & vicious in me today traces straight back to that evil hour in September of '69 when I decided to get heavily involved in the political process . . .

But that is another story. What worries me now — in addition to this still-unwritten saga of the California primary — is the strong possibility that my involvement in politics has become so deep and twisted that I can no longer think rationally about that big screen porch above the beach except in terms of an appointment as Governor of American Samoa.

I coveted that post for many years. For a while it was my only ambition. I pursued it relentlessly, and at one point in either 1964 or '65 it seemed within my grasp. Larry O'Brien, now the chairman of the Democratic Party, was the man in charge of pork-barrel/patronage appointments at the time, and he gave me excellent reason to believe my application was on the verge of bearing fruit. I was living at the Holiday Inn in Pierre, South Dakota, when the good news arrived. It came on a Wednesday, as I recall, by telegram. The manager of the Inn was ecstatic; he called a cab immediately and sent me downtown to a drygoods store where I bought six white sharkskin suits — using a Sinclair Oil card, which was subsequently revoked and caused me a lot of trouble.

I never learned all the details, but what was finally made clear — in the end, after a bad communications breakdown — was that O'Brien had pulled a fast one on me. As it turned out, he never had any intention of making me Governor of American Samoa, and when I finally realized this it made me very bitter and eventually changed my whole life.

Like George Metesky — the "Mad Bomber" who terrorized New York for 15 years to get even with Con Edison for over-charging him on his light bill and finally cutting off his electricity — I changed my whole lifestyle and channeled my energies into long-range plotting for vengeance on O'Brien and the Democratic Party. Instead of going into government service in the South Pacific, I fled Pierre, S.D. in a junk Rambler and drove to San Francisco — where I fell in with the Hells Angels and decided to become a writer instead of a diplomat.

Several years later I moved to Colorado and tried to live quietly. But I never forgot O'Brien. In the solitude of the Rockies I nursed a lust for vengeance . . . saying nothing to anyone, until suddenly in the summer of '69 I saw an opportunity to cripple the Democratic Party in Aspen.

This took about 15 months, and by the time it was done I was hopelessly hooked again on the politics of vengeance. The next step would have to be national. O'Brien was riding high in Washington, commanding a suite of offices in the Watergate and reluctantly gearing up to send a party with no real candidate and a $9 million debt from '68 into a hopeless battle with Nixon — a battle that would not only humiliate the candidate (The Man from Maine, they said), but also destroy the party by plunging it into a state of financial and ideological bankruptcy from which it would never recover.

Wonderful, I thought. I won't even have to *do* anything. Just watch, and write it all down.

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That was six months ago. But things are different now — and in the strange calm of those first few days after the votes were counted in California I began to see that George McGovern had scrambled my own carefully laid plans along with all the others — except his — and that I was suddenly facing the very distinct possibility that I might have to drag myself into a voting booth this November and actually pull the lever for the presidential candidate of the Democratic Party. O'Brien's party. That same gang of corrupt and genocidal bastards who not only burned me for six white sharkskin suits eight years ago in South Dakota and chased me through the streets of Chicago with clubs & tear gas in August of '68, but also forced me to choose for five years between going to prison or chipping in 20 percent of my income to pay for napalm bombs to be dropped on people who never threatened me with anything; and who put my friends in jail for refusing to fight an undeclared war in Asia that even Mayor Daley is now opposed to . . .

Ah . . . careful, careful: That trip has been done. No point getting off on another violent tangent. And besides, now that the Republicans are running The War, the Democrats are against it . . . or at least *some* of them are against it, including such recent converts as Ed Muskie and Hubert Humphrey. But it is also worth noting that the only Democrat to survive this hellish six-month gauntlet of presidential primaries is also the only genuine anti-war candidate.

Six months ago McGovern was dismissed by the press and the pols as a "one-issue candidate." And to a certain extent they were right. He has branched out a bit, since then, but The War in Vietnam is still the only issue in McGovern's jumbled arsenal that he never has to explain, defend or modify. All he has to do is start talking about Vietnam, and the crowd begins cheering and clapping.

For a "one issue candidate," George McGovern has done pretty well. Four years ago Gene McCarthy was another "one issue candidate" — the same issue poor McGovern is stuck with today — and if McCarthy had somehow managed to put together the kind of political organization that McGovern is riding now, he would be the incumbent president and the '72 campaign would be a very different scene.

Gene Porkorny, one of McGovern's key managers who also worked for McCarthy in '68, describes the difference between the two campaigns as "the difference between an organization and a happening." . . . Which is probably true, but that "happening" dumped a Democratic president and made McCarthy the front-runner all the way to California, where he lost to Robert Kennedy by only three percentage points. They were still counting the votes when Sirhan Sirhan fired a bullet into Kennedy's head.

What if McCarthy had won California? Would Sirhan have gone after him, instead of Kennedy? . . . Like Artie Bremer, who stalked Nixon for a while, then switched to Wallace. Assassins, like politicians and journalists, are not attracted to losers.

'That's One Story You'll Never Hear'

Strange speculation . . . and worth pursuing, no doubt, on a day when I have more time. Is the Governor's mansion in American Samoa on a cliff above the beach? Does it have a big screen porch? Sometime soon I will have to speak with Mankiewicz about this. I don't look forward to it, but perhaps we can work something out if we handle the whole thing by telephone.

Some people are easier to deal with at a distance, and Frank is apparently one of them. His whole manner changes when you confront him in person. It is very much like dealing with a gila monster who was only pretending to be asleep when you approached him — but the instant you enter his psychic territory, a radius of about six feet, he will dart off in some unexpected direction and take up a new stance, fixing you with a lazy unblinking stare and apparently trying to make up his mind whether to dart back and sink a fang in your flesh or just sit there and wait till you move on.

This is the way Mankiewicz behaved when I ran across him around midnight, a week or so before election day, in the hallway outside the McGovern press room in the Wilshire Hyatt House Hotel and asked him if he could help me out with some details on a story I'd just picked up in a strip joint called The Losers on La Cienega Boulevard — a very strange tale about Hubert Humphrey keeping a private plane on standby at a nearby landing strip, ready to take off at any moment for Vegas and return the same night with a big bag of cash, which would then be rushed to Humphrey headquarters at the Beverly Hilton and used to finance a bare-knuckle media blitz against McGovern during the last days of the campaign.

The story was at least second-hand by the time I heard it, but the source seemed reliable and I was eager to learn more

—Continued on next page

Below, the McGovern Campaign Train in the unaccustomed position of a front-runner. But first things first: Opposite page, the Vincent Black Shadow.

Annie Leibovitz

Stuart Bratesman Jr.

Fear and Loathing in California:

The coolest man in the whole McGovern entourage on Tuesday was McGovern himself: by noon the crisis had passed & he dove into the pool . . .

—Continued from Preceding Page

. . . but there was no point in calling Humphrey on a thing like this, so I brooded on it for a while and finally decided — for reasons better left unexplained, at this point — that the only two people even half-likely to know anything about such a bizarre story as this one were Mankiewicz and Dick Tuck.

But a dozen or so phone calls failed to locate either one of them, so I wandered up to the press room to get a free drink and check the bulletin board for a message of some kind from Tim Crouse, who had gone off about six hours earlier to find a bottle of Schnapps and continue his research on How the Press Covers The Campaign. The project had already stirred up a surprising amount of outspoken resentment among the objects of his study, and now he had gone out to get crazy on German whiskey with a bunch of people who thought he was planning to skewer them in the public prints.

The press room was crowded: Two dozen or so ranking media wizards, all wearing little egg-shaped ID tags from the Secret Service: Leo Sauvage/La Figaro, Jack Perkins/NBC, R. W. Apple/NY Times . . . the McGovern campaign went big-time, for real, in California. No more of that part-time, secondary coverage. McGovern was suddenly the front-runner, perhaps the next President, and virtually every room in the hotel was filled with either staff or media people . . . 12 new typewriters in the press suite, ten phones, four color TV sets, a well-stocked free bar, even a goddamn Mojo Wire . . .

(Footnote: aka 'Xerox Telecopier." We have had many inquiries about this. "Mojo Wire" was the name originally given the machine by its inventor, Raoul Duke. But he signed away the patent, in the throes of a drug frenzy, to Xerox board chairman Max Palevsky, who claimed the invention for himself and re-named it the "Xerox Telecopier." Patent royalties now total $100 million annually, but Duke receives none of it. At Palevsky's insistence he remains on the ROLLING STONE payroll, earning $50 each week, but his "sports column" is rarely printed and he is formally barred by court order, along with a Writ of Permanent Constraint, from Palevsky's house & grounds).

But Crouse was nowhere in sight. I stood around for a while, trying to piece together another grisly unsubstantiated rumor about "heavy pols preparing to take over the whole McGovern campaign" . . . Several people had chunks of the story, but nobody had a real key so I left to go back down to my room to work for a while.

That was when I ran into Mankiewicz, picking a handful of thumb-tacked messages off the bulletin board outside the door.

"I have a very weird story for you," I said.

He eyed me cautiously. "What is it?"

"Come over here," I said, motioning him to follow me down the corridor to a quiet place . . . Then I told him what I had heard about Humphrey's midnight air-courier to Vegas. He stared down at the carpet, not seeming particularly interested—but when I finished he looked up and said "Where'd you *hear* that?"

I shrugged, sensing definite interest now. "Well, I was talking to some people over at a place called The Losers, and—"

"With Kirby?" he snapped.

"No," I said. "I went over there looking for him, but he wasn't around." Which was true. Earlier that day Kirby Jones, McGovern's press secretary, had told me he planned to stop by The Losers Club later on, because Warren Beatty had recommended it highly . . . but when I stopped by around midnight there was no sign of him.

Mankiewicz was not satisfied. "Who was there?" he asked. "Some of *our* people? Who was it?"

"Nobody you'd know," I said. "But what about this Humphrey story? What can you tell me about it?"

"Nothing," he said, glancing over his shoulder at a burst of yelling from the press room. Then: "When's your next issue coming out?"

"Thursday."

"Before the election?"

"Yeah, and so far I don't have anything worth a shit to write about—but this thing sounds interesting."

He nodded, staring down at the floor again, then shook his head. "Listen," he said. "You could cause a lot of trouble for us by printing a thing like that. They'd know where it came from, and they'd jerk our man right out."

"What man?"

He stared at me, smiling faintly.

At this point the story becomes very slippery, with many loose ends and dark spots — but the nut was very simple: I had blundered almost completely by accident on a flat-out byzantine spook story. There was nothing timely or particularly newsworthy about it, but when your deadline is every two weeks you don't tend to worry about things like scoops and newsbreaks. If Mankiewicz had broken down and admitted to me that night that he was actually a Red Chinese agent and that McGovern had no pulse, I wouldn't have known how to handle it — and the tension of trying to keep that kind of heinous news to myself for the next four days until ROLLING STONE went to press would almost certainly have caused me to lock myself in my hotel room with eight quarts of Wild Turkey and all the Ibogaine I could get my hands on.

But this strange tale about Humphrey & Vegas had very little news value. It's only real value, in fact, was the rare flash of contrast it provided to the insane tedium of the surface campaign. Important or not, this was something very different: Midnight flights to Vegas, Mob money funneled in from Vegas to pay for Hubert's TV spots; spies, runners, counterspies; cryptic phone calls from airport phone booths . . . Indeed; the dark underbelly of big-time politics. A useless story, no doubt, but it sure beat the hell out of getting back on that goddamn press bus and being hauled out to some shopping center in Gardena and watching McGovern shake hands for two hours with lumpy housewives.

Unfortunately, all I really knew about what I called the U-13 story was the general outline and just enough key points to convince Mankiewicz that I might be irresponsible enough to go ahead and try to write the thing anyway. All I knew — or *thought* I knew — at that point, was that somebody very close to the top of the Humphrey campaign had made secret arrangements for a night flight to Vegas, in order to pick up a large bundle of money from unidentified persons presumed to be sinister, and that this money would be used by Humphrey's managers to finance another one of Hubert's eleven-hour fast-finish blitzkreigs.

Even then, a week before the vote, he was thought to be running almost ten points behind McGovern — and since the average daily media expenditure for each candidate was roughly $30,000 a day, Humphrey would need at least twice that amount to pay for the orgy of exposure he would need to overcome a ten-point lead. No less than a quick $500,000.

The people in Vegas were apparently willing to spring for it, because the plane was already chartered and ready to go when McGovern's headquarters got word of the flight from their executive-level spy in the Humphrey campaign. His identity remains a mystery — in the public prints, at least — but the handful of people aware of him say he performed invaluable services for many months.

His function in the U-13 gig was merely to call McGovern hq. and tell them about the Vegas plane. At this point, my second or third hand source was not sure what happened next. According to the story, two McGovern operatives were instantly dispatched to keep around the clock watch on the plane for the next 72 hours, and somebody from McGovern headquarters called Humphrey and warned him that they knew what he was up to.

In any case, the plane never took off and there was no evidence in the last week of the campaign to suggest that Hubert got a last minute influx of money, from Vegas or anywhere else.

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That is as much of the U-13 story as I could piece together without help from somebody who knew the details — and Mankiewicz finally agreed, insisting the whole time that he knew nothing about the story except that he didn't want to see it in print before election day, that if I wanted to hold off until the next issue he would put me in touch with somebody who would tell me the whole story, for good or ill.

"Call Miles Rubin," he said, "and tell him I told you to ask him about this. He'll fill you in."

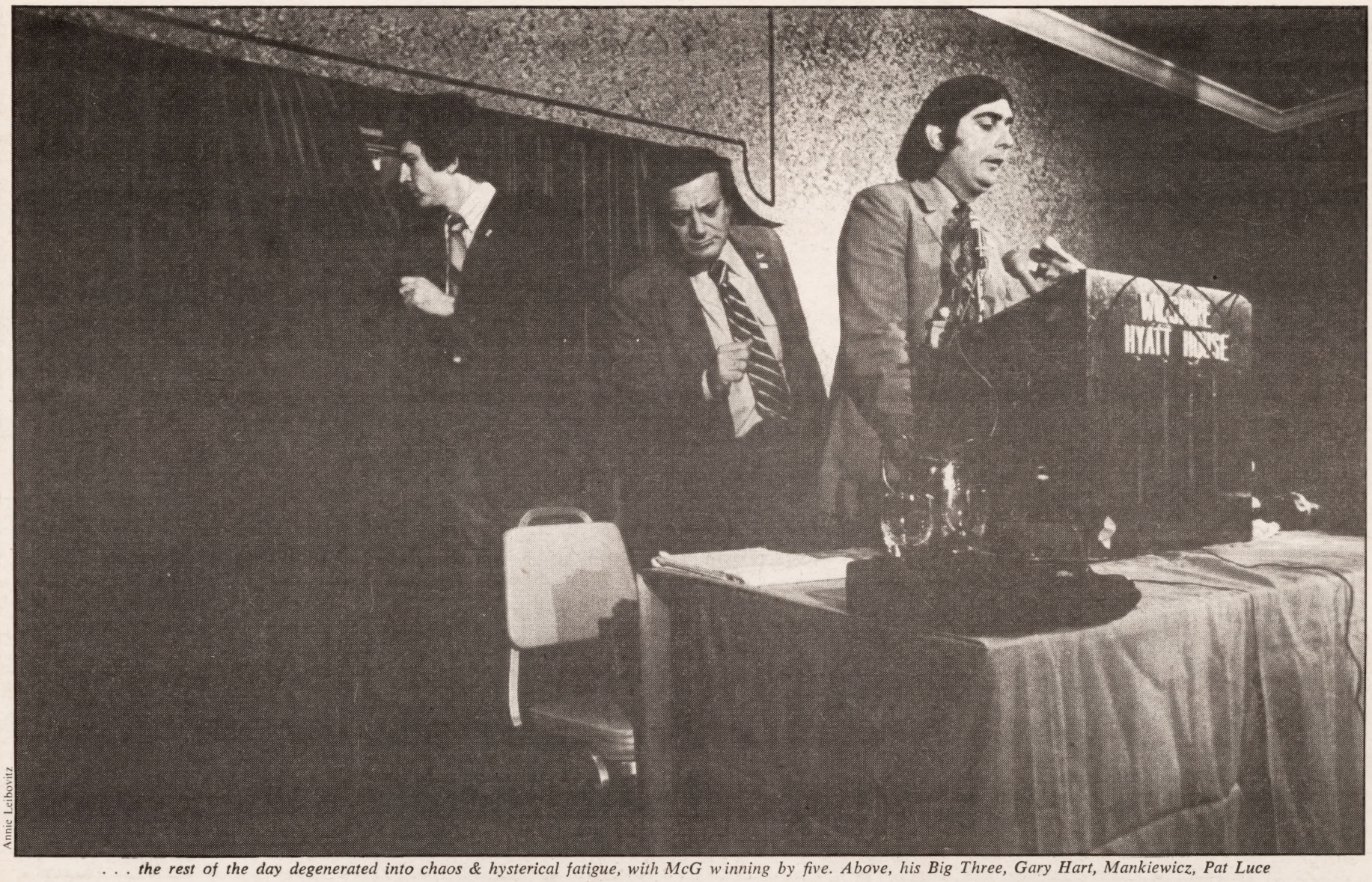
That was fine, I said. I was in no special hurry for the story, anyway. So I let it ride for a few days, missing my deadline for that issue . . . and on Wednesday I began trying to get hold of Miles Rubin, one of McGovern's top managers for California. All I knew about Rubin, before I called, was that several days eariler he had thrown Washington Post correspondent David Broder out of his office for asking too many questions — less than 24 hours before Broder appeared on Rubin's TV screen as one of the three interrogators on the first Humphrey-McGovern debate.

My own experience with Rubin turned out to be just about par for the course. I finally got through to him by telephone on Friday, and explained that Mankiewicz had told me to call him and find out the details of the U-13 story. I started to say we could meet for a beer or two sometime later that afternoon and he could—

"Are you kidding?" he cut in. "That's one story you're never going to hear."

"What?"

"There's no point even talking about it," he said flatly. Then he launched into a three-minute spiel about the fantastic honesty and integrity that characterized the McGovern campaign from top to bottom, and why was it that people like me didn't spend more time writing about The Truth and The Decency and The Integrity, instead of picking around the edges for minor things that weren't im-



Annie Leibovitz

. . . the rest of the day degenerated into chaos & hysterical fatigue, with McG winning by five. Above, his Big Three, Gary Hart, Mankiewicz, Pat Luce

portant anyway?

"Jesus Christ!" I muttered. Why argue? Getting anything but pompous bullshit and gibberish out of Rubin would be like trying to steal meat from a hammerhead shark.

"Thanks," I said, and hung up.

That night I found Mankiewicz in the press room and told him what had happened.

He couldn't understand it, he said. But he would talk to Miles tomorrow and straighten it out.

I was not optimistic; and by that time I was beginning to agree that the U-13 story was not worth the effort. The Big Story in California, after all, was that McGovern was on the brink of locking up a first-ballot nomination in Miami—and that Hubert Humphrey was about to get stomped so badly at the polls that he might have to be carried out of the state in a rubber sack.

The next time I saw Mankiewicz was on the night before the election and he seemed very tense, very strong into the gila monster trip . . . and when I started to ask him about Rubin he began ridiculing the story in a VERY LOUD VOICE, so I figured it was time to forget it.

Several days later I learned the reason for Frank's bad nerves that night. McGovern's fat lead over Humphrey, which had hovered between 14 and 20 percentage points for more than a week, had gone into a sudden and apparently uncontrollable dive in the final days of the campaign. By election eve it had shrunk to five points, and perhaps even less.

The shrinkage crisis was a closely-guarded secret among McGovern's top command. Any leak to the press could have led to disastrous headlines on Tuesday morning. Election Day. . . . McGOVERN FALTERS; HUMPHREY CLOSING GAP. . . . a headline like that in either the Los Angeles Times or the San Francisco Chronicle might have thrown the election to Humphrey, by generating a last minute Sympathy/Underdog turnout and whipping Hubert's field workers into a frenzied "get out the vote" effort.

But the grim word never leaked, and by noon on Tuesday an almost visible wave of relief rolled through the McGovern camp. The dike would hold, they felt, at roughly five percent.

The coolest man in the whole McGovern entourage, on Tuesday, was George McGovern himself — who had spent all day Monday on airplanes, racing from one critical situation to another. On Monday morning he flew down to San Diego for a major rally; then to New Mexico for another final-hour rally on the eve of the New Mexico primary (which he won the next day—along with New Jersey and South Dakota) . . . and finally on Monday night to Houston for a brief, unscheduled appearance at the National Governors' Conference, which was rumored to be brewing up a "stop McGovern" movement.

After defusing the crisis in Houston he got a few hours' sleep before racing back to Los Angeles to deal with another emergency: His 22-year-old daughter was having a premature baby and first reports from the hospital hinted at serious complications.

But by noon the crisis had passed, and somewhere sometime around one he arrived with his praetorian guard of eight Secret Service agents at a friend's house in Bel Air, where he immediately changed into swimming trunks and dove into the pool. The day was grey and cool, no hint of sun and none of the other guests seemed to feel like swimming.

For a variety of tangled reasons—primarily because my wife was one of the guests in the house that weekend—I was there when McGovern arrived. So we talked for a while, mainly about the Mankiewicz situation, and it occurred to me afterward that it was the first time he'd ever seen me without a beer can in my hand or babbling like a loon about Freak Power, election bets or some other twisted subject . . . but he was kind enough not to mention this.

It was a very relaxed afternoon. The only tense moment occurred when I noticed a sort of narrow-looking man with a distinctly predatory appearance standing off by himself at one end of the pool and glowering down at the white telephone as if he planned to jerk it out by the root if it didn't ring within ten seconds and tell him everything he wanted to know.

"Who the hell is *that*?" I asked, pointing across the pool at him.

"That's Miles Rubin," somebody replied.

"Jesus," I said. "I guess I should have known."

Moments later my curiosity got the better of me and I walked over to Rubin and introduced myself. "I understand they're going to put you in charge of press relations after Miami," I said as we shook hands.

He shook his head and said something I didn't understand, then hurried away. For a moment I was tempted to call him back and ask if I could feel his pulse. But the moment passed and I jumped into the pool, instead.

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The rest of that day disintegrated into chaos, drunkenness and the kind of hysterical fatigue that comes from spending too much time racing from one place to another and being shoved around in crowds. McGovern won the Democratic primary by exactly five percent—45-40—and Nixon came from behind in the GOP race to nip Ashbrook by 87-13.

Abandon All Hope, Ye Who Enter Here

She was gonna be an actress
and I was gonna learn to fly
She took off to find the footlights
and I took off to find the sky.

—Dante's 'Inferno': Book XX
Ciardi Trans.

George McGovern's queer idea that he could get himself elected President on the Democratic ticket by dancing a muted whipsong on the corpse of the Democratic Party is suddenly beginning to look very sane, and very possible. For the last five or six days in California, McGovern's campaign was covered from dawn to midnight by 15 or 20 camera crews, 75 to 100 still photographers, and anywhere from 50 to 200 linear/writing press types.

The media crowd descended on McGovern like a swarm of wild bees. At least half the rooms in this Wilshire Hyatt House headquarters hotel in downtown Los Angeles were filled with press/media people, and there was not one of them who doubted that he/she was covering The Winner. The sense of impending victory here was as sharp and all-pervasive as the gloom and desperation in Hubert Humphrey's national staff headquarters about ten miles west on Wilshire Boulevard at the far more chic and fashionable Beverly Hilton.

Upstairs in the McGovern press suite the big-time reporters were playing stud poker—six or eight of them, hunkered down in their shirtsleeves and their ties all loose around a long white cloth-covered table with a pile of dollar bills in the middle and the bar about three feet behind Tom Wicker's chair at the far end. At the other end of the room, to Wicker's left, there were three more long white tables, with four identical big typewriters on each table and a pile of white legal-size paper stacked neatly beside each typewriter. At the other end of the room, to Wicker's right, was a comfortable couch and a giant floor-model 24-inch Motorola color TV set . . . The screen was so big that Dick Cavett's head looked almost as big as Wicker's, but the sound was turned off and nobody at the poker table was watching the TV set anyway. Mort Sahl was dominating the screen with a seemingly endless, borderline hysteria monologue about a bunch of politicians he didn't have much use for—(Muskie, Humphrey, McGovern) — and two others (Shirley Chisholm and former New Orleans DA Jim Garrison) that he liked.

I knew this, because I had just come up the outside stairway from my room one floor below to get some typing paper, and I'd been watching the Cavett show on my own 21-inch Motorola color TV.

I paused at the door for a moment, then edged around to the poker table towards the nearest stack of paper. "Ah, decadence, decadence . . ." I muttered. "Sooner or later it was bound to come to this."

Kirby Jones, McGovern's press secretary, looked up and grinned. "What are you bitching about this time, Hunter? Why are you always bitching?"

"Never mind that," I said. "You owe me $20 and I want it now."

"What?" he looked shocked. "Twenty dollars for what?'

I nodded solemnly. "I knew you'd try to welsh. Don't tell me you don't remember that bet."

"What bet?"

"The one we made on the train in Nebraska," I said. "You said Wallace wouldn't get more than 300 delegates . . . But he already has 317, and I want that $20."

He shook his head. "Who *says* he has that many? You've been reading the New York Times again." He chuckled and glanced at Wicker, who was dealing. "Let's wait until the convention, Hunter, things might be different then."

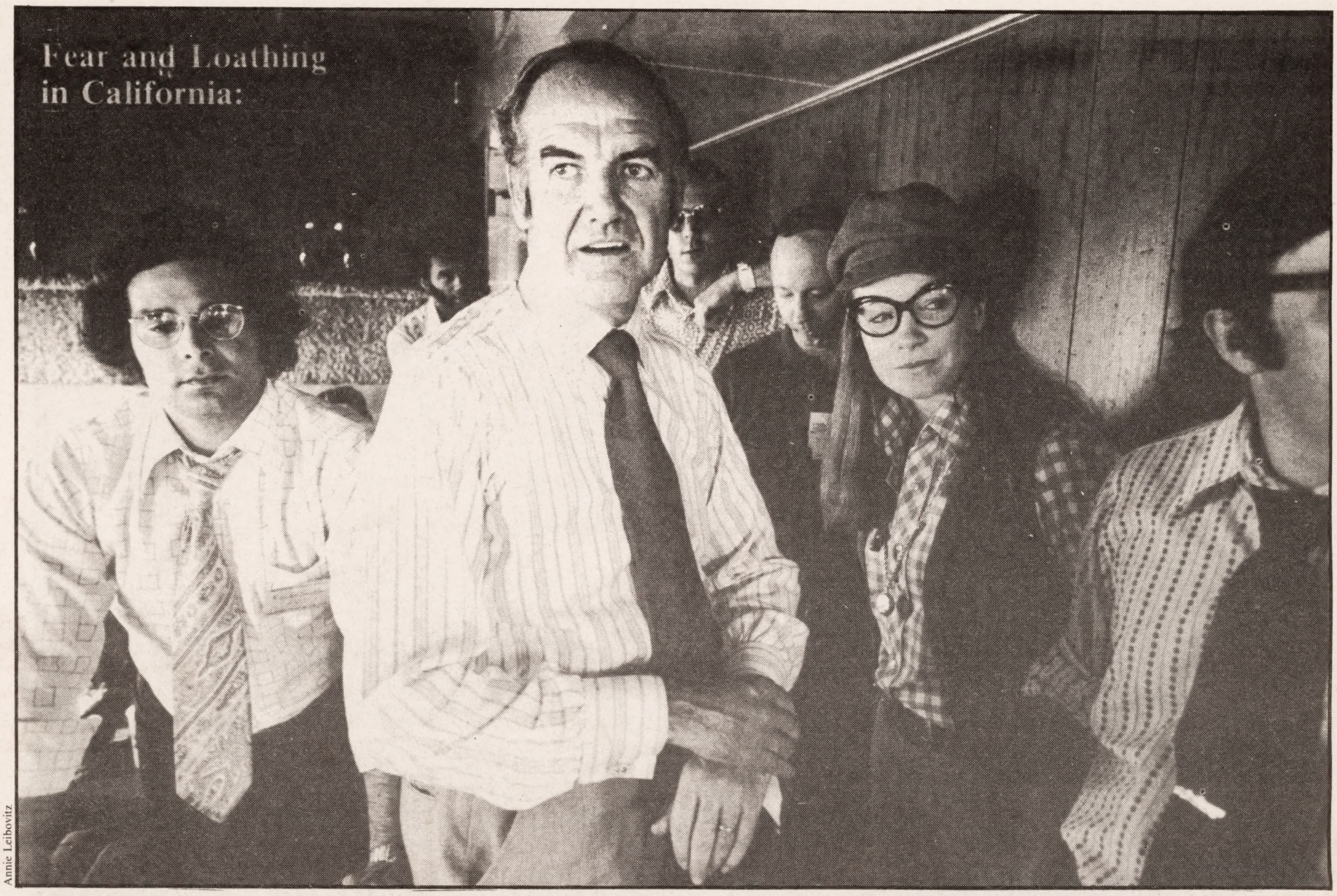
"You pig," I muttered, easing toward the door with my paper. "I've been hearing a lot about how the McGovern campaign is finally turning dishonest, but I didn't believe it until now."

He laughed and turned his attention back to the game. "Let's wait until the convention, Hunter. That's when we'll count the marbles."

I shook my head sadly and left the room. Jesus, I thought, these bastards are getting out of hand. Here we were still two weeks away from D-day in California, and the McGovern press suite was already beginning to look like some kind of Jefferson-Jackson Day stag dinner. I glanced back at the crowd around the table and realized that not one of them had been in New Hampshire. This was a totally different crowd, for good or ill. Looking back on the first few weeks of the New Hampshire campaign, it seemed so different from what was happening in California that it was hard to adjust to the idea that it

—Continued on Next Page

Fear and Loathing in California:



Annie Leibovitz

Accused of being not only a Marijuana Sympathizer but also a Fellow Traveler . . . almost a dopesmoking card-carrying Red: above McGovern & Shirley MacLaine . . .

—Continued from Preceding Page

was still the same campaign. The difference between a sleek front-runner's act in Los Angeles and the spartan, almost skeletal machinery of an underdog operation in Manchester was almost more than the mind could deal with all at once.

New Hampshire Flashback

Four months ago on a frozen grey afternoon in New Hampshire the McGovern "press bus" rolled into the empty parking lot of a motel on the outskirts of Portsmouth. It was 3:30 or so, as I recall, and we had an hour or so to kill before the Senator would arrive by air from Washington and lead us downtown for a hand-shaking gig at Booth fishworks.

The bar was closed, but one of McGovern's advance men had arranged a sort of beer/booze and sandwich-meat smorgasbord for the press in a lounge just off the lobby . . . so all six of us climbed out of the bus, which was actually an old three-seater airport limousine, and I went inside to kill time.

Of the six passengers in the "press bus," three were local McGovern volunteers. The other three were Ham Davis from the Providence Journal, Tim Crouse from the ROLLING STONE Boston Bureau, and me. Two more media/press people were already inside: Don Bruckner from the Los Angeles Times, and Michelle Clark from CBS.

There was also Dick Dougherty, who had just quit his job as chief of the L.A. Times New York bureau to become George McGovern's press secretary, speechwriter, main fixer, advance man and all-purpose traveling wizard. Dougherty and Bruckner were sitting off by themselves at a corner table when the rest of us straggled into the lounge and filled our plates at the smorgasbord table: olives, carrots, celery stalks, salami, deviled eggs . . . but when I asked for beer, the middle-aged waitress who was also the desk clerk said beer "wasn't included" in "the arrangements," and that if I wanted any I would have to pay cash for it.

"That's fine," I said. "Bring me three Budweisers."

She nodded. "With three glasses?"

"No. One glass."

She hesitated, then wrote the order down and lumbered off toward wherever she kept the beer. I carried my plate over to an empty table and sat down to eat and read the local paper . . . but there was no salt and pepper on the table, so I went back up to the smorgasbord to look for it and bumped into somebody in a tan gabardine suit who was quietly loading his own plate with carrots and salami.

"Sorry," I said.

"Pardon *me*," he replied.

I shrugged and went back to my table with the salt and pepper. The only noise in the room was coming from the L.A. Times corner. Everybody else was either reading or eating, or both. The only person in the room not sitting down was the man in the tan suit at the smorgasbord table. He was still fumbling with the food, keeping his back to the room. . . .

But there was something familiar about him. Nothing special — but enough to make me glance up again from my newspaper; a subliminal recognition-flash of some kind, or maybe just the idle journalistic curiosity that gets to be a habit after a while when you find yourself drifting around in the nervous murk of some story with no apparent meaning or spine to it. I had come up to New Hampshire to write a long thing on the McGovern campaign—but after 12 hours in Manchester I hadn't seen much to indicate that it actually existed, and I was beginning to wonder what the fuck I was going to write about for that issue.

There was no sign of communication in the room. The press people, as usual, were going out of their way to ignore each other's existence. Ham Davis was brooding over the New York Times, Crouse was re-arranging the contents of his knapsack, Michelle Clark was staring at her fingernails, Bruckner and Dougherty were trading Sam Yorty jokes . . . and George McGovern was still shuffling back and forth at the smorgasbord table—totally absorbed in it, studying the carrots. . . .

Jesus Christ! I thought. The candidate! That crouching figure up there at the food table is George McGovern.

But where was his entourage? And why hadn't anybody else noticed him? Was he actually *alone*?

No, that was impossible. I had never seen a presidential candidate moving around in public without at least ten speedy "aides" surrounding him at all times. So I watched him for a while, expecting to see his aides flocking in from the lobby at any moment . . . but it slowly dawned on me that The Candidate was by *himself*: there were no aides, no entourage, and nobody else in the room had even noticed his arrival.

This made me very nervous. McGovern was obviously waiting for somebody to greet him, keeping his back to the room, not even looking around—so there was no way for him to know that nobody in the room even knew he was there.

Finally I got up and walked across to the food table, watching McGovern out of the corner of one eye while I picked up some olives, fetched another beer out of the ice bucket . . . and finally reached over to tap The Candidate on the arm and introduce myself:

"Hello, Senator. We met a few weeks ago at Tom Braden's house in Washington."

He smiled and reached out to shake hands. "Of course, of course," he said. "What are you doing up *here?*"

"Not much, so far," I said. "We've been waiting for *you*."

He nodded, still shuffling the carrots. I felt very uneasy. Our last encounter had been somewhat jangled. He had just come back from New Hampshire, very tired and depressed, and when he arrived at Braden's house we had already finished dinner and I was getting heavily into drink. My memory of that evening is somewhat dim, but even in dimness I recall beating my gums at top speed for about two hours about how he was doing everything wrong and how helpless it was for him to think he could ever accomplish anything with that goddamn albatross of a Democratic Party on his neck, and that if he had any *real* sense he would make drastic alterations in the whole style & tone of his campaign and re-model it along the lines of the Aspen Freak Power Uprising, specifically, along the lines of my own extremely weird and nerve-rattling campaign for Sheriff of Pitkin County, Colorado.

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McGovern had listened politely, but two weeks later in New Hampshire there was no evidence to suggest that he had taken my advice very seriously. He was still plodding along in the passive/underdog role, still driving back & forth across the state in his lonely one-car motorcade to talk with small groups of people in rural living rooms. Nothing heavy, nothing wild or electric. All he was offering, he said, was a rare and admittedly long-shot opportunity to vote for an honest and intelligent presidential candidate.

A very strange option, in any year — but in mid-February of 1972 there were no visible signs, in New Hampshire, that the citizenry was about to rise up and drive the swine out of the temple. Beyond that, it was absolutely clear — according to the Wizards, Gurus and Gentlemen Journalists in Washington — that Big Ed Muskie, the Man from Maine, had the Democratic nomination so deep in the bag that it was hardly worth arguing about.

Nobody argued with the things McGovern said. He was right, of course — but nobody took him very seriously, either . . .

The Hound & the Whore in L.A.: Showdown on Wilshire Blvd.

7:45 AM, L.A. . . . The sun is fighting through the smog now, a hot grey glow on the street below my window. Friday morning business-worker traffic is beginning to clog Wilshire Boulevard and the Glendale Federal Savings parking lot across the street is filling up with cars. Slump-shouldered girls are scurrying into the big Title Insurance & Trust Co. and Crocker National Bank buildings, rushing to punch in on the time-clock before 8:00.

I can look down from my window and see the two McGovern press buses loading. Kirby Jones, the press secretary, is standing by the door of the No. 1 bus and herding two groggy CBS cameramen aboard like some kind of latter-day Noah getting goats aboard the ark. Kirby is responsible for keeping the McGovern press/media crowd happy — or at least happy enough to make sure they have the time and facilities to report whatever McGovern, Mankiewicz and the other Main Boys want to see and read on tonight's TV news and in tomorrow's newspapers. Like any other good press secretary, Kirby doesn't mind admitting—off the record—that his love of Pure Truth is often tempered by circumstance. His job is to convince the press that everything The Candidate says is even now in the progress of being carved on stone tablets.

The Truth is whatever George says; this is all ye know and all ye need to know. If McGovern says today that the most important issue in the California primary is the question of whether or not to abolish the sodomy statutes, Kirby will do everything in his power to convince everybody on the press bus that the Sodomy Statutes *must* be abolished

. . . and if George decides tomorrow that his pro-sodomy gig isn't making it with the voters, Kirby will get behind a quick press release to the effect that "new evidence from previously obscure sources" has convinced the Senator that what he really meant to say was that Sodomy itself should be abolished.

This kind of fancy footwork was a lot easier executed back there in the early primaries than it is now. Since Wisconsin, however, McGovern's words have been watched very carefully. Both his mushrooming media entourage and his dwindling number of opponents have pounced on anything even vaguely controversal or potentially damaging in his speeches, press conferences, position papers or even idle comments.

McGovern is very sensitive about this sort of thing, and for excellent reason. In three of the last four big primaries (Ohio, Nebraska & California) he has spent an alarmingly big chunk of his campaign time *denying* that, behind his calm and decent facade, he is really a sort of Trojan Horse candidate — coming on, in public, as a bucolic Jeffersonian Democrat; while secretly plotting to seize the reins of power and turn them over at midnight on Inauguration Day to a Red-bent hellbroth of Radicals, Dopers, Traitors, Sex Fiends, Anarchists, Winos and "extremists" of every description.

The assault began in Ohio, when the Senator from Boeing (Henry Jackson, D-Wash.) began telling everybody his advance man could round up to listen to him that McGovern was not only a Marijuana Sympathizer, but also a Fellow Traveler. . . . Not *exactly* a dope-sucker and a card-carrying Red, but almost.

In Nebraska it was Humphrey, and although he dropped the Fellow Traveler slur, he added Amnesty and Abortion to the Marijuana charge and caused McGovern considerable grief. By election day the situation was so grim in traditionally conservative, Catholic Omaha that it looked like McGovern might actually *lose* the Nebraska primary, one of the kingpins in his overall strategy. Several hours after the polls closed the mood in the Omaha Hilton "situation room" was extremely glum. The first returns showed Humphrey well ahead, and just before I was thrown out I heard Bob Dougherty — Lt. Gov. of South Dakota and one of McGovern's close friends and personal advisors — saying: "We're gonna get zinged tonight, folks."

It was almost midnight before the outstate returns began off-setting Hubert's big lead in Omaha, and by 2:00 AM on Wednesday it was clear that McGovern would win — although the final 6 percent margin was about half of what had been expected ten days earlier, before Humphrey's local allies had fouled the air with alarums about Amnesty, Abortion and Marijuana.

Sometime around 11:30 I was readmitted to the situation room — because they wanted to use my portable radio to get the final results — and I remember seeing Gene Porkorny slumped in a chair with his shoes off and a look of great relief on his face. Porkorny, the architect of McGovern's break-through victory in Wisconsin, was also the campaign manager of Nebraska, his home state, and a loss there would have badly affected his future. Earlier that day in the hotel coffee shop I'd heard him asking Gary Hart which state he would be assigned to after Nebraska.

"Well, Gene," Hart replied with a thin smile. "That depends on what happens tonight, doesn't it?" Porkorny stared at him, but said nothing. Like almost all the other key people on the staff, he was eager to move on to California.

"Yeah," Hart continued. "We were planning on sending you out to California from here, but recently I've been thinking more and more about that slot we have open up there in the Butte, Montana office."

Again, Porkorny said nothing . . . but two weeks later, with Nebraska safely in the bag, he turned up in Fresno and hammered out another McGovern victory in the critically important Central Valley. And that slot in Butte is still open . . .

Which is getting a bit off the point, here. Indeed. We are drifting badly — from motorcycles to Mankiewicz to Omaha, Butte, Fresno . . . where will it end?

The point, I think, was that in both the Ohio and Nebraska primaries, back to back, McGovern was confronted for the first time with the politics of the rabbit-punch and the groin shot, and in both states he found himself dangerously vulnerable to this kind of thing. Dirty politics confused him. He was not ready for it — and especially not from his fine old friend and neighbor, Hubert Humphrey. Toward the end of the Nebraska campaign he was spending most of his public time explaining that he was Not for abortion on demand, Not for legalized Marijuana, Not for unconditional amnesty . . . and his staff was becoming more and more concerned that their man had been put completely on the defensive.

This is one of the oldest and most effective tricks in politics. Every hack in the business has used it in times of trouble, and it has even been elevated to the level of political mythology in a story about one of Lyndon Johnson's early campaigns in Texas. The race was close and Johnson was getting worried. Finally he told his campaign manager to start a massive rumor campaign about his opponent's life-long habit of enjoying carnal knowledge of his own barnyard sows.

"Christ, we can't get away with calling him a pig-fucker," the campaign manager protested. "Nobody's going to believe a thing like that."

"I know," Johnson replied. "But let's make the sonofabitch *deny* it."

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McGovern has not learned to cope with this tactic yet. Humphrey used it again in California, with different issues, and once again George found himself working overtime to deny wild, baseless charges that he was: 1) Planning to scuttle both the Navy and the Air Force, along with the whole Aerospace industry, and 2) He was a sworn foe of all Jews, and if he ever got to the White House he would immediately cut off all military aid to Israel and sit on his hands while Russian-equipped Arab legions drove the Jews into the sea.

McGovern scoffed at these charges, dismissing them as "ridiculous lies," and repeatedly explaining his positions on both issues — but when they counted the votes on election night it was obvious that both the Jews and the Aerospace workers in Southern California had taken Humphrey's bait. All that saved McGovern in California was a long-overdue success among Black voters, strong support from Chicanos and a massive pro-McGovern Youth Vote.

This is a very healthy power base, if he can keep it together—but it is not enough to beat Nixon in November, unless McGovern can figure out some way to articulate his tax and welfare positions a hell of a lot more effectively than he did in California. Even Hubert Humphrey managed to get McGovern tangled up in his own economic proposals from time to time during their TV debates in California — despite the fact that toward the end of that campaign Humphrey's senile condition was so obvious that even I began feeling sorry for him.

Nevermore

Indeed. Feeling sorry. Senile. Sick. Tangled . . . That's exactly how I'm beginning to feel. All those words and many others, but my brain is too numb to spit them out of the memory bank at this time. No person in my condition has any business talking about Hubert Humphrey's behavior. My brain has slowed down to the point of almost helpless stupor. I no longer even have the energy to grind my teeth.

So this article is not going to end the way I thought it would . . . and looking back at the lead I see that it didn't even start that way either. As for the middle, I can barely remember it. There was something about making a deal with Mankiewicz and then Seizing Power in American Samoa, but I don't feel ready right now. Maybe later . . .

Way out on the far left corner of this desk I see a note that says "Call Mankiewicz — Miami Hotel rooms."

That's right. He was holding three rooms for us at the convention. Probably I should call him right away and firm that up . . . or maybe not.

But what the hell? These things can wait. Before my arms go numb there were one or two points I wanted to make. This is certainly no time for any heavy speculation or long-range analysis — on any subject at all, but especially not on anything as volatile and complex as the immediate future of George McGovern vis-a-vis the Democratic Party.

Yet it is hard to avoid the idea that McGovern has put the Party through some very drastic changes in the last few months. The Good Ole Boys are not pleased with him. But they can't get a grip on him either — and now, less than three weeks before the convention, he is so close to a first ballot victory that the old hacks and ward-heelers who thought they had total control of the Party less than six months ago now find themselves skulking around like old winos in the side alleys of presidential politics — first stripped of their power to select and control delegations, then rejected as delegates themselves when Big Ed took his overcrowded bandwagon over the high side on the first lap . . . and now, incredible as it still seems to most of them, they will not even be allowed into the Party convention next month.

One of the first people I plan to speak with when I get to Miami is Larry O'Brien: Shake both of his hands and extend powerful congratulations to him for the job he has done on the Party. In January of 1968 the Democratic Party was so fat and confident that it looked like they might keep control of the White House, the Congress and in fact the whole US Government almost indefinitely. Now, four and a half years later, it is a useless bankrupt hulk. Even if McGovern wins the Democratic nomination, the Party machinery won't be of much use to him, except as a vehicle.

"Traditional politics with a Vengeance" is Gary Hart's phrase—a nutshell concept that pretty well describes the theory behind McGovern's amazingly effective organization.

"The politics of Vengeance" is a very different thing—an essentially psychotic concept that Hart would probably not go out of his way to endorse.

Vehicle . . . vehicle . . . vehicle — a very strange looking word, if you stare at it for eight or nine minutes . . . "Skulking" is another interesting-looking word.

And so much for that.

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The morning news says Wilbur Mills is running for President again. He has scorned all invitations to accept the Number Two spot with anyone else — especially George McGovern. A very depressing bulletin. But Mills must know what he's doing. His name is said to be magic in certain areas. If the Party rejects McGovern, I hope they give it to Mills. That would just about make the nut.

Another depressing news item — out of Miami Beach this time — says an unnatural number of ravens have been seen in the city recently. Tourists have complained of being kept awake all night by "horrible croaking sounds" outside their hotel windows. "At first there were only a few," one local businessmen explained. "But more and more keep coming. They're building big nests in the trees along Collins Avenue. They're killing the trees and their droppings smell like dead flesh."

Many residents say they can no longer leave their windows open at night, because of the croaking. "I've always loved birds," said another resident. "But these goddamn ravens are somethings else!"

. . . & above, Aide Frank Mankiewicz: toward the end of the campaign, an under-dog/loser/senile pity vote appeared for Humphrey